

FOREIGN DEPARTMENT

IN CHARGE OF
LAVINIA L. DOCK



ORGANIZATION NOTES

OLDEN TIMES IN ENGLISH HOSPITALS.

"THE 'Orders and Ordinances for the better government of the Hospitall of BARTHOLOMEW the lesse,' first published in 1580, throw an interesting light on the subject of old times in St. Bartholomew's Hospital.

"The 'Matron's Charge' (perhaps it has altered but little in these three and a quarter centuries) certainly did not contemplate any such relaxation for the nursing staff as the meeting of the modern League of Nurses provided. In this 'Charge,' after recounting the duties of the matron herself, there are directions for the 'governance and order of all the sisters of this house,' where the following paragraph occurs:

" 'Also at such times as the Sisters shall not be occupied about the poor, ye shall set them to spinning, or doing of some other manner of work that may avoid idleness and be profitable to the poor of this house. Also ye shall receive the flax provided by the Governours of this House, and the same being spun by the Sisters, ye shall commit to the said Governours that they may both put order for the weighing of the same to the Weaver, and for the measuring of it at the returning thereof.'

"That these directions were carried out is shown by an entry in the hospital journals at this date, 'Paide and given to the sisters for their good spyning xijd.' Seeing that there were twelve sisters at the time, the governors of the hospital appear to have believed in moderation in all things.

"It is not easy to picture the surprise of the sisters of 1580 coming back to Smithfield to take part in a league entertainment, though it might fall in the category of 'some other manner of work that may avoid idleness and be profitable to the poor of this house;' but there is sound counsel in another portion of the charge, where the holder of the office is enjoined to 'exhort them (the patients) to vertue and temperance, declaring this house to be appointed for the harbour and succour of the deer members of Christ's body, and not of drunkards, and unthankfull persons.'

"In those days evidently a house surgeon would have met with sympathy and support from the authorities if he had referred 'police cases' elsewhere.

"To the sisters the 'Charge' was even more explicit, for after ordering obedience to the matron, 'who is appointed to bee your chief Governesse and Ruler,' the charge goes on, 'Ye shall also faithfully and charitably serve, and help the poor in all their griefes and diseases as well as by keeping them sweet and clean as in giving them their meats and drinks after the most honest and comfortable manner.' Evidently in those merry times the sister was in the habit of appropriating the 'extras' ordered for the patients. 'Also ye shall use unto

them good and honest talk such as may comfort and amend them . . . And above all things see that ye avoyd, abhor and detest scoldings and drunkennesse, as most pestilent and filthy vices.' And after all, it was well that there should have been no league where such injunctions were necessary.

"But in 1580 the management of our hospital (efficient as it must have been, or those stormy days would have brought disaster to it) strikes the modern mind as strange, for after the governors comes a list of the 'Officers of the Hospitall,' 'the Hospiteler, the Renter Clerk, the Butler, the Porter, the Matron, the Sisters (twelve), the Byddles (eight).'

"The matron and twelve sisters seem to have carried out the whole of the nursing arrangements, which perhaps were not so heavy as now, since before admitting a patient the surgeons had to satisfy the hospitaller that he was likely to prove curable, incurable cases being ineligible for admission as in-patients. Moreover, the physicians do not seem to have been in the habit of visiting their patients in the wards, but sat in state in the hall and had the sick poor brought before them. The moral and religious welfare of the in-patients appears to have been the first care, and after that the relief, if possible, of their bodily ailments. The hospitaller was the resident at that time who visited the patients, and in all the charges, including that to the surgeons, there is mention made of the duty of ministering to their spiritual needs, for although the relief of poverty and sickness was the object of the hospital, possibly more poverty than sickness found admission to the wards. Under such circumstances nursing may luckily not have been of such importance as it is to-day." (*St. Bartholomew's Hospital Journal*.)

"In the Glasgow Infirmary, at the beginning of the last quarter century, a nurse had to commence as a semi-wardmaid, under the name of assistant nurse, and work her way without any direct instruction. She was called at three A.M., commencing work at four, which included the ordinary cleaning, such as grates, scullery, and bathroom, sweeping of ward, dusting, etc. Carrying of food for the ward supply and the washing up of the dishes had also to be done by her, and much carrying which is now done by men. Her duties ended at eight-thirty P.M., without any definite time off duty. This so-called 'assistant' obtained in the 'surgical houses' only. In the medical the day and the night nurses did all between them, nursing and cleaning, with the exception of the ward being scrubbed out once a week by a little army of women, six in number, who went the round of all the wards in turn.

"It was surprising to find the good nurses that were sometimes the outcome of this very empirical manner of obtaining knowledge, but these were certainly the exceptions. We had better be silent about the majority, sit kindly in judgment, as the circumstances and conditions were to blame, not the women.

"The most of these nurses slept in small rooms adjoining the wards, and took all their meals (excepting dinner) in the ward kitchens. Nurses and servants shared the same dining-room and had to carry a knife, fork, and glass with them. The nursing staff at this time numbered seventy-six.

"The managers were desirous of remedying this state of matters, and after much consideration a plan was devised for the carrying out of a building into the quadrangle to provide dining-accommodation for the resident doctors, and utilizing their old rooms for the nurses, providing suitable dining-accommodation with proper table equipments.

"An attempt was also made to separate the housework from the nursing, and was partially brought about by the appointing of a woman to every two

wards to do the roughest part of the work. A time-table was introduced, which allowed each nurse two hours off duty daily and shortened the hours on duty. A uniform dress was also supplied to the nurses at the expense of the infirmary. Lectures were instituted to enable them to have a better understanding of their duties, but these were a questionable boon, as they had to be attended at the cost of sleep or recreation." (Mrs. Strong, Paper on "Preliminary Work.")

"A REFORMATION.—You want to hear something about my training? Well, I came in on May 1, 1877, just five-and-twenty years ago. I was one of a batch of twelve probationers, the first to be trained at St. Bartholomew's Hospital. Before we came there was no sort of training for the nurses, and of nursing as you understand it now there was simply none. The matron, Mrs. Drake, greatly disapproved of such an innovation as 'lady-nurses,' and tried hard to dissuade me from entering when I came up to be interviewed. There was no entrance examination. We all arrived one morning and proceeded to put on our uniform. What was it? The present probationer's uniform, with the exception of the caps, which were small caps without strings. This was quite different from the uniform of the so-called 'staff-nurses,' who wore brown merino dresses, aprons without bibs, collars, no cuffs, caps or no caps as they liked, and, when worn, of any description. I remember hearing some weeks after we arrived that the head-dispenser had pronounced us 'an ornament to the square.'

"In the afternoon we attended a lecture by Sir Dyce (then Dr.) Duckworth in the lecture-theatre. Though especially for our benefit, it was an open lecture. A few of the sisters and staff-nurses were there, and many students. What were the students doing there? Oh, curiosity brought them, I suppose. You see, we were something quite new, and caused a considerable stir in the place.

"That night I was sent to 'Harley,' where I shared a room opening into the ward (the 'dressing-room') with the staff-nurse. I did not get much rest. To begin with, my room-mate was very drunk and very sick. Being ignorant of the symptoms, I wasted much pity on her. When I did fall off to sleep, I was awakened by frightful screams and shouts of 'Murder! Fire!' I proceeded to wake my companion, who growled, 'Be quiet; it's only 18.' Drunkenness was very common among the staff-nurses, who were chiefly women of the 'charwoman' type, frequently of bad character, with little or no education, and few of them with even an elementary knowledge of nursing. Some of them might have worked previously at some other hospital, but as often as not they had had no experience whatever when engaged as 'staff'-nurses. One woman, I remember, who came some little time after I did and under whom I worked, had been a lady's-maid, and had never done a day's nursing. She was, however, of a decidedly superior class to any of the others, and was, moreover, quite respectable. It was very usual for the friends to bring in presents of gin to bribe the nurses to be kind to the patients. The worst women we had were those who used to come in to look after very bad cases, more particularly at night. They were called 'night-extras.' They were mostly dreadful persons, possessing neither character nor ability, who used to apply here for work much as women now apply for charring. I remember being so horrified soon after I came at the idea of a very bad case (a man whose leg was amputated through the thigh) being left to the tender mercies of one of these creatures, that I summoned up courage to ask Sister Harley to put me on as 'special' instead. (I was considered rather a cheeky person.) She consented, and I looked after him in the daytime; at night, of course, he had the 'lydy' from outside.

" Among the sisters there was already some improvement. Some there still were of whose virtues the less said the better, and some were wholly untrained, a knowledge of nursing not being in those days a necessary qualification for a sister. Sister Pitcairn, however, had been for a year or two in Pitcairn, and was undoubtedly much the most highly trained nurse then in the hospital, and Sister Eyes was the ophthalmic sister, the first to be appointed for that special work. A few, also, had been trained at the 'Nightingale' Home. We should not think much now of the training they had had, but it was a good deal for that time. They also had had considerable experience, and were, moreover, clever and capable women of superior character.

" How were we taught? Well, by the sisters very little. (The staff-nurses were not capable of teaching anything.) Few of the sisters both could and would teach us. I do not think any sister taught me anything except Sister Matthew (as she then was) and Sister Pitcairn. Sir Dyce Duckworth or Mr. Willett lectured to us or gave a practical demonstration once a week. What sort of demonstrations? Mr. Willett used to have in his out-patient children and teach us to bandage, to put on splints, to make and apply plasters, bandages, and so on. Sir Dyce would take us into the wards and give us a lesson on bed-making, poultice-making, or on the contents of the doctor's cupboard, or down to the bath-rooms, where he and old Williams, the bathman, used to show us the best way to get patients in and out of the bath, and how to prepare special baths of various kinds. We were known as 'Ducky's lambs.' The bathrooms? Oh, the present bathrooms off the wards were only just being built. Before we had them all patients who were in fit condition were bathed in the baths under the out-patient department. The only baths in the wards were in the kitchens, and were covered over with wooden covers, which often served as a table on which to carve the dinners.

" Then, we picked up what we could, and the resident staff and students (!) taught us a good deal. Mr. Butlin also (then surgical registrar) was very kind, and taught me a great deal. You see, we were quite a novelty, and everyone took a great interest in us. Dr. Griffith, I think, taught me to take temperatures. He was a dresser. The thermometers in use then were very much longer than those we use now, and had to be read while in position, as they ran down at once when removed from the mouth or armpit. They cost twelve shillings sixpence each. The sisters and nurses never used a thermometer, the dressers and clerks took the temperatures when required. We probationers were expected to learn the use of the clinical thermometer, but there was generally a row if a sister caught us with one.

" To show you how little we were shown our work, I must tell you two things I remember having to do within my first month. One day a sweep was brought in to Harley straight from his work with six fractured ribs. 'Pro,' said sister, 'go and wash that patient.' I had never been shown how to set about such a task, and his hair alone, which was full of soot, nearly drove me to despair. Another day I was ordered to give soap-and-water injections to the same man, and also to a man with a very bad compound fracture of the femur. I had never given one before, and had no instructions whatever given to me. I know I was in tears before I had finished, and so, I fear, were the patients. We had always to find out things for ourselves.

" How did we get on with the staff-nurses? On the whole, very well. You see, our coming brought about several improvements. To begin with, before then all the three nurses (night and day) shared the one small bedroom, sleeping 'Box

and Cox.' When we came the 'night home' was arranged to accommodate the night-nurses, which left only the two day-nurses to sleep in the ward bedroom. Then a dining-room was also made (part of our present library), where breakfast and dinner were provided. Tea we had in the ward (not in the kitchen), and for supper we had only what we chose to get for ourselves before going to bed. Before we came all the nurses' food was cooked and eaten in the wards, as also the sisters'. No, the sisters had no dinner provided. They were given a chop (uncooked) on Sundays only. They lived entirely in their rooms, which were half the size most of them are now.

"What hours? We were on duty from seven A.M. until ten P.M. Twice a week we were supposed to go off duty for two hours, six to eight P.M., and to have a half-day (three to nine) once a fortnight. I say 'supposed,' as we never got off punctually; the work could not be finished in time. When we came in we went on duty again until ten o'clock.

"How does the work now compare with the work then? Well, of course, nursing, as you understand it now, was utterly unknown. Patients were not 'nursed' then, they were 'attended to,' more or less; but there was only one nurse in each side of the ward, and the work was very hard—lockers, locker-boards, and tables, of course, to scrub every day. No, we did not, as a rule, scrub the floors, though I have scrubbed the whole of the front-ward of Matthew (Faith) on a special occasion before six A.M. Luke was the only ward where the floor was scrubbed daily, each nurse doing her half, and sister herself lending a hand if they were very busy. (Luke was considered a particularly smart ward in those days, and sister always wore a black silk dress when she went round with the visiting physician.) The patients had their beds made once a day, the bad cases had their sheets drawn at night. In Matthew all the patients got out of bed every day, even the typhoids—it was considered rather smart. Then you thought nothing of having fourteen or fifteen poultices to change. All wounds, of course, suppurated, and required dressing or poulticing twice or three times a day. I well remember Mr. Willett saying, when lecturing to us on wounds, 'There are three modes of healing: the first, most to be desired, but never seen, by first intention; the second, by granulation; and the third, which is always seen, by supuration.'

"What was our life in the home like? There was nothing of the sort. We had breakfast and dinner in the home; otherwise, when off duty, if we did not go out, we sat in the ward kitchens or in our bedrooms. The food was fairly good. There was no one to overlook our behavior or to see that we went to bed at the right time or anything of that sort. Indeed, I often sat up very late, and when in Faith went round frequently with sister and the house physician when they made the night round. I learned a good deal then. I generally had to write my lectures out before I got up in the morning, between five and six. It was the only quiet time and the only time of the day when my head was clear enough; at night I was too tired.

"At the end of the year we passed an examination held much on the same lines as now, but I believe that marks were not awarded by the matron until after Miss Manson came (Mrs. Bedford-Fenwick). We were awarded certificates and offered posts as staff-nurses, which few were bold enough to accept on account of the existing condition of things.

"We objected to associating constantly and sharing rooms with the staff-nurses, to changing our clean cotton uniform for their brown staff-dresses, and to carrying the soiled linen from the wards to the laundry (which the staff-

nurses had then to do), and various other things. The treasurer promised to try and alter these things, and did by degrees.

"Things improved by degrees. One or two out of every batch of probationers (they came in every three months) stayed on after passing the examination. Then Miss Machin, who became matron in 1879, increased the period of training to two years, so that we had a certain number of second-year nurses on whom we could depend. It was not, however, until after Mrs. Bedford-Fenwick came in 1881 that the old, untrained sisters and nurses were gradually weeded out and the training lengthened to three years.

"A tremendous change? Yes, greater than you can imagine. I have really no words in which to describe the state the hospital was in when I came as probationer, and if I had, you would say the account was not fit for publication. When first I became sister, I often stayed up all night because there was no one to look after my patients but an old woman probably both drunk and disreputable, and unable either to read or write.

"It was many years before the nursing staff in general was treated with anything approaching respect." (Sister Casualty, in *League News*.)

ITEMS

ANOTHER League of Nurses has been established in England, for the graduates of the Chelsea Infirmary. The matron of the hospital, Miss Eleanor C. Barton, is the president, and nurses who have worked in the infirmary, though not trained there, are eligible for associate membership. This makes the fifth league among English nurses since last September, when St. Bart's League was the only one in existence.

